

# Arid Zone Trees



## *Acacia erioloba* Camel Thorn or Giraffe Thorn



### Horticultural Qualities *Acacia erioloba* Camel Thorn or Giraffe Thorn

**Foliage:** Deciduous  
**Mature Height:** 20' - 30'  
**Mature Width:** 20' - 40'  
**Growth Rate:** Slow  
**Hardiness:** 18 degrees F  
**Exposure:** Full Sun  
**Leaf Color:** Green  
**Shade:** Dense  
**Flower Color:** Yellow  
**Flower Shape:** Ball  
**Flower Season:** Spring  
**Thorns:** Yes  
**Box Sizes Produced:** 24"  
**Propagation Method:** Seed

[www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com)

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# *Acacia erioloba*

## Camel Thorn or Giraffe Thorn

A new Acacia species being introduced into southwestern landscapes is *Acacia erioloba* (Camel Thorn or Giraffe Thorn) native to the desert regions of southern Africa. As an evergreen, Giraffe Thorn offers much needed shade year round while providing food and shelter for wildlife. Selections growing in Arizona appear to be cold temperature deciduous. Young trees have a generally upright growth habit but as they mature the canopy spreads to form a wide canopy that provides substantial shade. It is the dominant tree in the natural landscape of Namibia and Botswana, growing primarily along the banks and in the middle of river beds. Thorns occur in pairs along the trunk and numerous ball shaped yellow flowers appear in the spring. Trees are reported to be hardy to 20 degrees F. Most of the more popular desert adapted landscape species (Mesquites, Palo Verdes, Sweet Acacias) tend to mature at about 25' to 35' tall and wide. Giraffe Thorn probably takes its name from its large stature. It typically grows to a mature height and width of 30 to 60 feet, leading one south African botanist to call it, "the king of trees in the arid regions of southern Africa." *A. erioloba* presents an opportunity to introduce a truly large stature tree into the southwest landscape palette that has a form and appearance that compliments our native desert species. Mature specimens could be used as a screen planting around the margins of a landscape, as a visual focal point or entry marker. The ultimate size of these trees should be taken into consideration when placing them in the landscape design. In natural setting the mature size of the tree is heavily influenced by the annual rainfall in the area. These observations suggest that the mature size of Giraffe Thorn trees used in landscapes settings could be controlled by effective irrigation management.

The seed pods are eaten by animals as fast as they fall and for cows that feed on the seed pods, there seems to be a noticeable increase in milk production. There are reports that certain times of the year the seed pod can be poisonous. The wood is very strong and resistant to termites and bores favoring the wood for wagons and mine props. For medicinal use by the natives, they would burn the bark and ground the by-product to remedy headaches and dried seed pods crushed to a white powder would cure ear infections. The common name Camel Thorn is a mistranslation from the Afrikaans name, 'Kameeldoring', derived from kameelperd meaning giraffe. Early South African settlers named the tree 'Kameeldoring' meaning Giraffe Thorn.

## Cultural Practices

Foster the development of a more dispersed root system and reduce the risk of wind throw by arranging irrigation emitters at varying distances from the trunk to encourage roots to "seek out" water and nutrients. Irrigation emitter arrangement along with other information on irrigations practices for desert trees can be found at [www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com) and click on the FAQ link.

Prune as needed to reinforce the structure and form of the tree. Periodic thinning is the most desirable method of pruning. Avoid hedging or heading back desert species, as this will only stimulate excessive branching. Do not remove more than 30% of the canopy during the summer as this can lead to sunburn injuries that can later be invaded by wood boring insects. Always use clean, sharp tools that are cleaned regularly in a 10% solution of bleach. For detail pruning guide see [www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com) and click on the FAQ interactive button.

Periodically insect pests can be a problem on some desert trees. On young trees, insect infestation can slow typical seasonal growth. Inspect trees during the growing season for common garden sucking insects such as aphids, thrip, whiteflies or psyllids. During dry months, (May and June) in dusty conditions, spider mites can appear. Monitor for infestation and apply controls as needed. Spray applications of water or water and Safer Soap give short-term control (3 to 7 days) for small insect population. For heavy infestation or longer control use federally registered insecticides. A contact insecticide application will kill existing adults. An application with a systemic soil drench will provide 8 to 12 weeks control for any post application insect hatchings or migration of insects. Before using pesticide for the first time or on new plants or cultivar, treat a few plants and check for phytotoxicity. **Always read label and follow label instruction before using pesticides. For pesticide control recommendations contact a licensed pest control advisor.**

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